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Promoting Equality and Equity in Vocational Education in Tanzania



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Promoting Equality and Equity in Vocational Education in Tanzania – The Kilimanjaro VET Project

Introduction

The education system in Tanzania plays an important role in the country's development. It includes different levels: pre-primary, primary, secondary, and higher education. The government has worked hard to improve education, especially in rural areas, with new reforms and policies. Primary education is free and mandatory, so more children are going to school now. However, there are still challenges, particularly in secondary and vocational education.

Gender Equality

Gender equality in education is an important issue in Tanzania. The government has made good progress by making primary education free and mandatory. However, there are still cultural and structural challenges that prevent both girls and boys from having equal access to education. Historically, more attention has been given to the struggles faced by girls, which is important. Girls often deal with problems like early marriage, teenage pregnancy, and societal views that devalue their education. These challenges, along with poor school facilities and a lack of sanitary options, lead to high dropout rates for girls, especially in rural areas.

On a positive note, there are efforts to address these issues, and they are producing results. For instance, girls' attendance in primary school rose from 75% in 2016 to 85% in 2024 (World Bank Document, 2024). This shows that focused actions can make a difference.

Gender inequality in education affects both girls and boys, and boys in Tanzania also face serious challenges that often go unnoticed. Many boys have to leave school early because their families are struggling financially, and they need to help earn money through child labor. Some boys experience neglect or abuse at home, which can hurt their school performance and emotional health. Unfortunately, there are not enough support systems in place to address the unique needs of boys, especially in cultures where being a man is linked to being strong and independent.

To achieve genuine gender equality in education, it is essential to adopt a holistic and inclusive approach that addresses the needs of all learners. Equal access to practical and technical education must be ensured for every student, regardless of gender. This includes dismantling harmful stereotypes, creating safe and supportive learning environments, and promoting diverse role models across all fields. Only by recognizing the unique challenges faced by both girls and boys can Tanzania build an education system that is truly equitable and capable of empowering all young people to reach their full potential.

Education in Rural and Urban Areas

There is a significant disparity in the quality of education between rural and urban areas in Tanzania. Urban areas generally have better resources, including more qualified teachers, improved facilities, and higher educational outcomes. In contrast, rural areas often lack basic educational resources such as textbooks, laboratories, and adequate classrooms. Additionally, not all schools in rural regions have electricity, which further hampers the learning environment. The shortage of teaching materials complicates the teaching process as well. Moreover, students in rural areas often face long commutes, with poor road conditions making travel difficult. This situation is especially challenging for girls, as the journeys can be exhausting and sometimes dangerous. The absence of internet connectivity, computers, and mobile devices further hinders the educational experience in these areas. This disparity negatively impacts students' performance and their ability to complete their education (Tanzania Education Report, 2024).

Economic Situation and Affordability of Education

Tanzania's economy has been growing steadily, with a GDP growth rate of 5.6% in 2024 (African Development Bank, 2024). However, many families still struggle with poverty, making it difficult to afford secondary education. Although primary education is free, secondary education requires fees, which many families cannot afford. This financial barrier disproportionately affects girls, as families may prioritize boys' education when resources are limited (World Bank Document, 2024). The Fee-Free Basic Education Program (FBEP), introduced in 2016, aimed to expand access to education, but hidden costs and resource limitations continue to pose challenges (Policy Forum, 2024).

Language Challenges in Secondary Education

The switch from using Swahili in primary school to English in secondary school can be tough for many students. This is especially a problem for those in rural areas, where students often don't have enough English skills to do well on national exams (East African Journal of Education and Social Sciences, 2023). This language barrier not only makes it harder for them to succeed in school but also reduces their chances for further education and jobs. Teachers also struggle to teach in English, which adds to the problem (International Journal of Research Studies in Education, 2024).

Vocational Education and Training VET

Vocational education and training is an essential part of Tanzania's education system, and it is aimed at providing practical skills that meet labor market demands. However, vocational education and training is fee-based, which limits access for students from poor backgrounds. The government has recognized the importance of vocational training and is working to integrate it more effectively into the education system. This includes updating the curriculum to include practical skills and ensuring that vocational education and training is accessible to all students (NACTVET, 2024).

Recent developments show a growing commitment to **gender equality and social inclusion** in vocational education. In 2023, Tanzania, with support from the African Development Bank, launched the *Support for Skills Development and Youth Employment in the Blue Economy Project (SEBEP)*. A key component of this initiative is the development of a **National Gender Strategy and Action Plan** aimed at mainstreaming gender in skills development. This strategy is designed to guide programming and operational activities to ensure that vocational education is inclusive and responsive to the needs of women and marginalized groups (African Development Bank, 2023).

UNESCO's *Strategy for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) 2022–2029* also aligns with Tanzania's goals, emphasizing the importance of developing skills for inclusive and peaceful societies. The strategy promotes empowerment, decent work, and transitions to digital and green economies, with a strong focus on equity and access for all learners, including women and youth (UNESCO, 2022).

Furthermore, the *UNESCO Country Strategy for Tanzania (2023–2027)* outlines specific actions to strengthen gender-transformative education systems. These include creating safe learning environments and addressing barriers that disproportionately affect girls and women. The strategy supports Tanzania's broader development goals, including the National Development Vision 2025 and the African Union Agenda 2063, by ensuring that vocational education contributes to building equitable and knowledgeable societies (UNESCO, 2023).

Life Skills Curriculum as a Part of Equality and Equity Education in Tanzania

The Life Skills curriculum in Tanzania has its roots in national education reforms initiated in the early 2000s. The first formal framework, the **National Life Skills Education Framework (NLSEF)**, was introduced in **2010** by the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training. It was developed as a strategic response to the growing social and health challenges facing Tanzanian youth, particularly in the context of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The aim was to equip young people with essential life competencies to make informed decisions, build resilience, and contribute positively to society. Initially, the curriculum focused on areas such as self-awareness,

communication, interpersonal relationships, and decision-making. Over time, it evolved to include broader themes such as **gender equality, social inclusion, and employability**, aligning with Tanzania's socio-economic development goals and the increasing demand for a skilled labor force.

The **Vocational Education and Training Authority (VETA)** adopted and adapted the Life Skills curriculum to better serve the needs of vocational education. Recognizing that technical skills alone are not sufficient for success in the modern workforce, VETA integrated life skills into its training programs to support the **holistic development** of students. This included enhancing their emotional intelligence, teamwork, problem-solving abilities, and understanding of workplace ethics.

The **2025 revised version** of the curriculum represents a significant update, reflecting lessons learned from earlier implementations and incorporating feedback from educators, employers, and development partners. It emphasizes **practical job readiness, entrepreneurship, and gender-sensitive pedagogy**, ensuring that all students—regardless of background—are prepared for both employment and active citizenship.

This evolution demonstrates Tanzania's commitment to not only technical excellence but also to fostering an inclusive, equitable, and socially responsible education system

Objectives and Implementation of the Life Skills Curriculum

The Life Skills curriculum created by the Vocational Education and Training Authority (VETA) in Tanzania is designed to meet the changing educational and economic needs of the country. Its main goal is to help students grow by teaching them not just technical skills, but also personal, social, and job-related skills that are important for success in work and life. The curriculum highlights the importance of self-awareness and self-esteem, which are key to personal development. It also focuses on improving students' communication skills, both speaking and writing, so they can interact effectively in various social and professional situations.

The curriculum is designed to help students build important skills for the workplace. It teaches teamwork and how to resolve conflicts, which are crucial for working well with others. Students also learn to think critically and make decisions, helping them handle difficult situations confidently. Emotional intelligence is another key part, focusing on understanding and managing feelings and being empathetic toward others, which supports mental health and good relationships.

Additionally, the program includes health and wellness education to encourage healthy lifestyle choices. It also covers entrepreneurship and financial literacy, preparing students for independence and potential self-employment. Overall, the curriculum aims to ensure that students graduate with practical job skills that meet what employers are looking for.

To achieve these objectives, the curriculum employs a range of interactive and learner-centered pedagogical methods. These include structured discussions, collaborative group work, and role-playing exercises that

simulate real-life scenarios. Case-based learning is used to connect theoretical knowledge with practical applications, while hands-on projects and experiential activities provide opportunities for students to apply their skills in meaningful ways. These methods are intended to create an inclusive and engaging learning environment that accommodates diverse learning styles and encourages active participation.

The implementation of the Life Skills curriculum has been evaluated by UNICEF, which has recognized its positive impact on students' behavior, problem-solving abilities, and academic resilience. However, the assessment also identified several challenges that hinder its full effectiveness. One of the most significant issues is the limited availability of training and support for teachers, many of whom lack the pedagogical tools and confidence to deliver the curriculum effectively. Cultural sensitivities, particularly around topics such as sexuality and gender roles, can also restrict open dialogue in the classroom. Moreover, there is considerable variability in how the curriculum is adopted and implemented across different regions, leading to inconsistencies in student outcomes.

In response to these challenges, several solutions have been proposed. Expanding teacher training programs is essential to ensure that educators are well-prepared to facilitate life skills education. Engaging community leaders and stakeholders can help address cultural barriers and build local support for the curriculum. Additionally, standardizing implementation practices and establishing robust monitoring and evaluation systems are necessary to ensure consistency and quality across the country.

The Life Skills curriculum focuses on gender equality and social inclusion. It encourages equal opportunities for everyone in education and careers, challenges harmful stereotypes, and supports students in choosing paths based on their interests and skills rather than societal expectations. The curriculum also offers inclusive sexuality education and career guidance to help students make informed and fair choices.

To ensure the curriculum's long-term success, it is recommended that policy efforts focus on institutionalizing teacher training, developing culturally responsive teaching materials, and continuously evaluating the curriculum's impact. These measures will help create an educational environment where all students—regardless of gender, background, or ability—can thrive and contribute meaningfully to society's effectiveness.

Pedagogical Methods Aligned with VETA Life Skills Curriculum Focusing on Equality and Equity Content

Method	Implementation
Promoting Gender Equality	Include discussions about gender equality in all subjects. Use examples of successful women from different fields as role models.
Inclusive Sexuality Education	Provide comprehensive sexual education that includes all genders and sexual orientations. Use age-appropriate materials and create a safe environment for discussions.
Equitable Career Planning	Offer career guidance that encourages all students, regardless of gender, to pursue their interests and strengths. Provide information on non-traditional career paths.
Encouraging Female Participation	Create initiatives and programs that specifically encourage female students to participate in STEM subjects and vocational training.
Addressing Gender Stereotypes	Challenge and address gender stereotypes through classroom discussions, activities, and media. Promote a culture of respect and equality.
Supporting Students with Disabilities	Ensure that learning environments and materials are accessible to students with disabilities. Provide necessary accommodations and support.
Cultural Sensitivity Training	Provide training for teachers and students on cultural sensitivity and inclusivity. Promote respect for diverse backgrounds and perspectives.
Anti-Bullying Programs	Put in place programs to stop bullying, especially for those who are often left out. Make schools safe and supportive for everyone.
Mentorship Programs	Establish mentorship programs that connect students with mentors who can provide guidance, support, and positive role models.
Community Engagement	Engage the community to promote equality and fairness in education. Collaborate with local organizations to assist students and families.

Promoting Equality and Equity in Vocational Education and Training: The Kilimanjaro VET Project in Moshi

The Kilimanjaro VET project is funded by European Union, an Erasmus+ Capacity Building in the field of vocational education and training VET program. It is focused on improving vocational education and training in the Kilimanjaro region, especially in Moshi. It runs from January 2023 to December 2025 and involves partners from Finland, Estonia, and Tanzania. The main goal of the project is to help vocational teachers develop their teaching skills, with a focus on ensuring equal opportunities and inclusion for all students.

Goals and Objectives of WP2 and WP5

To improve diversity and inclusion in Tanzania, we need to follow the laws and best practices at both the regional and school levels. This project is about creating guidelines for schools that align with legal requirements, emphasize the importance of affirmative programs, and enhance educational opportunities for girls. Work Package 2 (WP2) and Work Package 5 (WP5) of the Kilimanjaro VET project are focused on assessing equality in vocational education and training. They also seek to find practical ways to promote these values in how teachers interact with their students. The goal is to create a more welcoming and supportive learning atmosphere for all students, regardless of their gender, disability, or socio-economic status.

Workshops and Collaborative Efforts

In work packages 2 and 5, we held several workshops and discussion sessions to promote equality in education. Teachers, administrators, and other stakeholders worked together to identify challenges and share good practices. We gathered the insights from these sessions and related literature into a detailed report. This report highlights the current situation of equality in vocational education and training in the Kilimanjaro area and offers practical recommendations for improvement. Additionally, the teachers involved wrote reflective essays about their methods for promoting fairness in their teaching practices.

Challenges and Current State

The Kilimanjaro VET project has identified several significant challenges in vocational education and training. One major issue is the lack of infrastructure, especially in rural areas, where educational facilities and teaching materials are often inadequate. Teacher training is another critical area; many educators do not receive the necessary support and continuous professional development to effectively utilize new teaching technologies and methods. Although digital learning offers great opportunities, its adoption has been slow due to infrastructure deficiencies and limited digital skills among both teachers and students. Gender inequality is also a significant concern, as fewer women participate in vocational education in comparison to men. This disparity is often a result of traditional gender roles, safety issues, and a lack of confidence among women when pursuing non-traditional fields.

Practical Steps for Promoting Gender Equality

To address these challenges, the project has suggested some key strategies. First, it's important to create more job opportunities and pass laws that promote equality. Families and communities play a crucial role in this



effort, and having skilled teachers is necessary to give all students equal chances to succeed. Schools should work on breaking down stereotypes and creating welcoming learning environments. This includes offering training in both traditionally male and female fields and encouraging students to explore non-traditional careers. Additionally, providing free education through scholarships and improving cooperation between private and public sectors can help reduce poverty as an obstacle to education.

Ideas for Promoting Equality

Teachers working on the project have suggested some simple steps to help make sure all students are treated equally in the classroom. First, it's important to know which students need extra help and to find good ways to support them in their studies. Sometimes, using Swahili for teaching can help students who have language difficulties.

All staff members should understand the needs of these students and help them properly. Teachers should not only look for the support that students need but also improve their own teaching skills and methods. This might mean having training sessions for teachers to help them grow professionally.

Combining daily life skills with school subjects can help students learn better overall. The school curriculum should focus on teaching important life skills, like taking care of oneself, family planning, and living a healthy life. Additionally, it's important to think about including jobs that are usually seen as for women in the education program and to encourage students to explore non-traditional career paths. This is an important way to promote gender equality in vocational education.

Teachers' Experiences in Promoting Inclusive Education in the Kilimanjaro VET Project

1. Supporting Students with Diverse Learning Needs

Teachers used various activities and assessment methods to cater to different learning styles and special needs. They held personal meetings with students and created individualized learning plans. Collaboration with special education and ESL (English as a Second Language) teachers was essential. Encouraging students to ask for help and to support each other helped create a supportive learning environment.

2. Effective Practices for Promoting Equity

Culturally responsive teaching involves recognizing and respecting different cultural backgrounds and including diverse perspectives in teaching. Creating a safe learning environment and addressing discrimination and bullying were priorities. Promoting openness and discussions encouraged students to express and share their thoughts and feelings. Breaking down gender stereotypes and providing equal opportunities for all students are important steps to promote gender equality.

3. Developing Equity Implementation

Teachers took part in regular training to improve their skills and shared useful ideas with each other. It was important to create school-wide equity initiatives and work together with the community,

including students' families and local groups. By gathering and looking at data on how students were doing, teachers could better understand their needs and improve their teaching.

Conclusion

Promoting equality and equity in vocational education and training in Tanzania is an important but challenging goal, especially with ongoing national education reforms. While Tanzania has made progress in making primary education accessible, there are still significant issues in secondary and vocational education. These issues include gender differences, regional gaps between cities and rural areas, language barriers in teaching, and financial challenges that make it hard for students from low-income families to access education.

The Life Skills curriculum created by the Vocational Education and Training Authority (VETA) is key in tackling these issues. This curriculum combines technical skills with personal and social skills, promoting the overall development of students. It covers important topics like self-awareness, communication, emotional intelligence, health education, entrepreneurship, and financial literacy using interactive and student-focused methods. UNICEF has evaluated the curriculum and found it to be effective, but they also noted challenges like the need for better teacher training and being sensitive to cultural contexts.

The **Kilimanjaro VET Project**, with a focus on the Moshi region, has provided valuable insights into how national strategies can be effectively localized. Teachers have begun to implement Life Skills content through individualized learning plans, inclusive teaching practices, and collaboration with special education professionals. However, the project has also revealed critical development needs that must be addressed to ensure sustainable impact.

Key Development Priorities for the Moshi Region

1. Strengthening Teacher Capacity

Continuous professional development is essential, particularly in inclusive pedagogy and culturally sensitive topics such as gender roles and sexuality education.

2. Operationalizing the Curriculum in Daily Practice

To effectively teach Life Skills, it's important to use different teaching methods that relate to students' everyday experiences. When teachers take time to think about their teaching practices, it can lead to better ways of incorporating these skills into the classroom.

3. Advancing Gender Equality

Programs that encourage girls' participation in STEM and non-traditional career paths must be expanded. Addressing stereotypes and providing mentorship are vital strategies.

4. Improving Infrastructure and Resources

Rural areas in Moshi need better facilities, electricity, and digital tools. Digital learning opportunities must be supported by targeted training for both teachers and students.

5. Engaging Communities and Stakeholders

Collaboration with families, local organizations, and community leaders is crucial for overcoming cultural barriers and fostering acceptance of inclusive education practices.

Promoting equality in vocational education and training in Tanzania is essential for sustainable development. The Kilimanjaro VET Project shows that real progress can be made when there is international collaboration, local knowledge, and inclusive teaching practices. By focusing on improving teacher skills, integrating relevant curriculum, and engaging with the community, the project has helped create a more inclusive vocational education system in Moshi.

However, achieving full equality remains challenging due to issues like gender gaps, infrastructure problems, and insufficient teacher training. The Life Skills curriculum offers a good starting point to tackle these challenges, but it relies on teachers being able to adapt lessons to local needs, having ongoing support, and working in well-equipped environments.

To truly achieve fairness in vocational education, we need to move beyond one-off projects to make lasting changes. This means incorporating inclusive values into school culture, building strong community partnerships, and ensuring that all students—no matter their gender, abilities, or background—can succeed. The Kilimanjaro VET Project is an excellent example of how targeted efforts can help meet national education goals and promote global commitments to quality education for everyone.

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